

SPECIES FACT SHEET

Brassicaceae (Mustard family)

Perennial Peppergrass*Lepidium latifolium***At a Glance**

- Herbaceous perennial
- Multi-stemmed plant reaching 3-8 feet (0.9-2.4 m) in height
- Stems emerge from large below-ground root system
- Stems and leaves are green to gray-green in color, waxy, and sometimes have reddish spots
- Flowers during late spring through summer, producing small white flowers in dense clusters
- Fruits are small, roundish, and reddish-brown
- Above-ground plant parts die in late summer to fall, with dead stems persisting
- Exotic

Habitat and Ecology

Perennial pepperweed is native to southeastern Europe and southwestern Asia (Renz 2000). The plant has been found in all states west of the Rocky Mountains, as well as other parts of the U.S. (see Figure 1). It may have been introduced as a contaminant of sugar beet seed. It grows in a variety of habitats where it is native, including fresh to saltwater wetlands, in and near agricultural fields, in waste places, and on slopes of varying elevation (California Invasive Plant Council no date). It can grow in similar places in

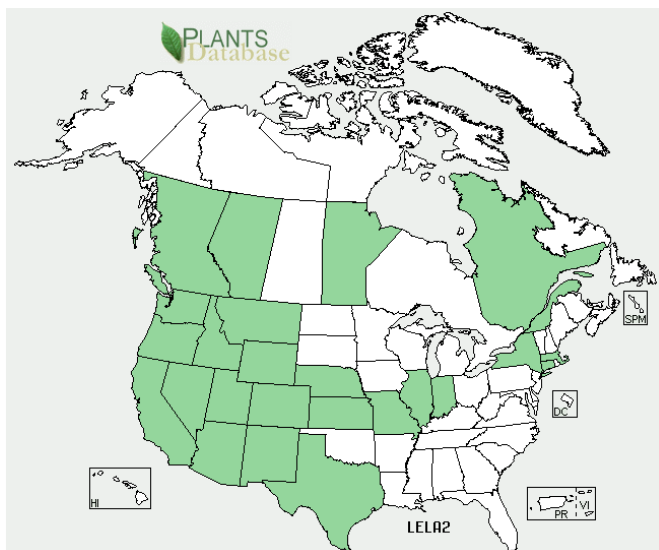


Figure 1. Distribution map courtesy of USDA Plants Database <http://plants.usda.gov/index.html>.

EXOTIC

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Perennial peppergrass

the U.S., and, once established, can grow into large monospecific stands (Renz 2000). Perennial pepperweed can alter the ecosystem in which it occurs by transporting salt ions, via its roots, from deep in the soil to the soil surface (Blank and Young 1997); this can lead to a change in species composition in favor of salt-tolerant plants.

Description

Perennial pepperweed is a perennial herbaceous plant that spreads by both seeds and creeping roots. It is multi-stemmed, grows 3 to 8 feet (0.9-2.4 m) tall, and has a heavy crown that may become woody (California Invasive Plant Council no date). Stems grow from its large underground roots and appear in early spring/late fall (Renz 2000). Stems are gray-green and waxy. Flowers and fruits are produced starting in late spring. Above-ground stems die during middle to late summer, with fruit remaining on the stems.

Leaves

Perennial pepperweed's leaves are hairless, gray-green in color, and have a waxy coating. Leaves on young plants have petioles and are 1-2 inches (2.5-5 cm) wide and 4-12 inches (10-30 cm) long. Leaves on older stems are alternate, sessile (having no stalk or petiole), and reduced in size upward. Margins of leaves are smooth or rounded and

have shallow teeth (California Invasive Plant Council no date).

Flowers and Fruit

Flowers of perennial pepperweed occur in panicles, or clusters, on the branch tips. Panicles are 5 to 6 inches (12.7-15.2 cm) wide. Flowers are 0.1 inches (3 mm) wide, with 4 white petals (0.06 inches [1.5 mm] long) and 4 white sepals (<1mm long) (California Invasive Plant Council no date). Flowers and fruit appear during late spring through summer months. Fruits are round to somewhat ovate in



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Appearance of panicles, stems, roots, & leaves

shape, 2-chambered, and about 0.08 inches (2 mm) long (Renz 2000). Fruit are covered with long hairs and held on pedicels (stalks) longer than the fruit. One seed is produced per fruit chamber. Seeds are about 0.04 inches (1 mm) long and 0.02 inches (0.5 mm) wide, slightly flattened, and reddish-brown. Seeds may fall from fruit during the winter or the following season.

Similar Species

Perennial pepperweed has a similar appearance to another exotic that occurs in the Southwest—whitetop (*Cardaria draba*) (California Invasive Plant Council no date). However, perennial pepperweed is considerably taller at 3 to 8 feet (0.9-2.4 m) (versus 0.7 to 1.6 feet, or 0.2-0.5 m). Also, unlike whitetop, the plant's upper leaves do not clasp the stem.

Etymology

The name “*lepidium*” is derived from the Greek word “*lepidion*”, which means “a little scale”; this is in reference to the shape of the fruit pods (Freckmann Herbarium no date). “*Latifolium*” is latin for “wide to broad leaves.”

References

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California Invasive Plant Council. No date. *Invasive Plants of California's Wildland, Lepidium latifolium*. Accessed May 2009, available online at <http://www.cal-ipc.org/ip/management/ipcw/pages/detailreport.cfm?usernumber=58&surveynumber=182.php>.

Freckmann Herbarium. No date. Plant details on *Lepidium latifolium* from the Robert W. Freckmann Herbarium website. University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. Accessed on May 14, 2009, at <http://wisplants.uwsp.edu/scripts/detail.asp?SpCode=LEPLAT>.

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Perennial pepperweed infestation